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IMPRISONED.

I KNOW how fair the sunset is to-night;
I see its crimson traces on the wall—
I know the western heaven is all alight;
But in this prisoning room I lose it all.

The pattern of the paper on the wall,
The titles of the books along the shelves,
The carpet's woven mazes, one and all
Weary my eyes as they repeat themselves.

Yet nature sends consolers, even here;
Pale, faithful asters, true as love in death,
Come from their autumn haunts, with smiles of cheer,
And sweet red clover wafts its healthful breath.

The gentian brings me, in its chalice blue,
Shut close and cool, a little of the sky;
The golden-rod, resplendent through and through,
Shakes out its yellow sunshine royally;

But all the freedom of the sky and air,
And all the glory of the earth and sea,
The thousand charms which make the world so fair,
And life so sweet—are shut away from me.

All that is fresh and cool on sea or land
Seems from my sense forevermore apart:
The flowers wither in my burning hand,
And tremble with the tumult of my heart.

Not mine the glorious visions which unfold
To saints who waver on life's slippery bound:
I catch no gleam from angels' crowns of gold,
I hear no heavenly harp's melodious sound.

Ah, when these earthly conflicts, fierce and sharp,
Are over, and life's tiresome story told,
I can be glad without the joyful harp,
And satisfied without the crown of gold.

So, if it be my time, let me depart—
My swath is mown, my few poor sheaves are bound—
After the workman's hand has lost its art,
Why should he stay?—why cumber he the ground?
—Elizabeth Akers Allen.

LOST LILLIAN BRACY;

A TRADITION OF CHARLES II.'S TIME.

CHAPTER X.

THE PERIL OF LETTY BRYCE'S LIPS.

FOR many minutes Letty Bryce wrote rapidly, at the table in the old hall of Bracy's Hope, by the torch now flaring somewhat low, apparently copying some of those dangerous papers which she had taken from the carved chest. The small hands that had thus far only been expert at counting and assorting the pieces of linen in the laundry, seemed equally deft at handling the pen; albeit it was evident that the girl wrote under no little excitement, and although once and again she paused for an instant and listened, as she had good warrant to do, in fear that some interruption might come before the completion of that task for which it had cost her so much of time and watching to find an opportunity.

At length—hark!—there were sounds without. Heavy steps came up the hall, and seemed at the door. Not those of Stephen Chester, returning, as the listening ears knew only too well: those, most certainly, either of the master of Bracy's Hope or some other who trode with equal forceful weight. There was even the sound of a hand, apparently at the door, though its opening could not well follow, as it had been locked close behind the servitor. But danger of discovery threatened, in one guise or another; and on the instant of the first sound, the papers were caught from the table with a hand that faltered not even if it trembled—those belonging to herself thrust hurriedly into concealment on her person, and those abstracted thence returned to the chest, the lid closed and fastened, with wondrous speed and so little noise as could not well have been heard by the most attentive ear without.

This done, poor Letty Bryce stood still and trembling by the table, her heart beating wildly, and a semblance of almost pitiful fright on the girlish face, while the hands grasped the discarded slate as if that, at the worst, might furnish some excuse for intrusion beyond her place.

Not too soon; for though the door opened not, the click of metal was heard at another and secret door, hidden in a panel of the corner, and until then unknown to the young girl; and in the next moment, when she had as yet scarce realized the shape of this new danger, the steps sounded within the

apartment instead of without, and Walter Bracy stood before her.

There was reason to believe that he had returned from some revel, beyond the Hope, for his garments seemed not a little in disorder, and his face was flushed as if from wine. That he had not known of the presence of Letty Bryce in the apartment, was sure; for, for the instant, seeing her, his inflamed eyes had the glare of wondering anger, changing only too soon into a far worse and more dangerous expression.

"How now, wench! What do you here?" he demanded, roughly and in hoarse voice.

"Lawk, measter, how feared I was! It be 'ee, measter, for sure and sartin, bean't it, now!" was the reply, the entrapped serving wench ceasing to need any semblance of fright, but seeking by a mighty effort to master herself and to gain time for thought, and for the speech in excuse which must needs follow.

"What do you here, I say? Who gave you right, wench, to be elsewhere at Bracy's Hope than in the laundry or the scullery?" was the harsh repetition of the previous questioning.

"Ees, measter, I will tell 'ee, if, mayhap, 'ee won't be so doleful hard wi' a poor girl—ees! Stephen do see I be so woundy stupid, like, and do tell me to write like him on this big stone board wi' un white marks—ees. It be so still here, like, measter, that I do come here, sometimes, a-tryin' if I can do summat wi' it—don't 'ee see, measter?"

This explanation, perhaps not all arrived at on the instant, but part of a previous thought for use in the event of detection, was accompanied with courtesies, and contortions of the body little else than wriggling, and the putting of a finger in mouth, and all the other accomplishments in deprecation, of poor Letty Bryce; with a bold stroke of finesse to close—nothing less than the attempt to interest the harsh master in the success of her endeavor, by holding up the slate, or more nearly thrusting it into his face, the very simplicity of earnestness in the concluding inquiry:

"I be a doin' of it noice, now—bean't I, measter?"

"Tush, wench, what have I to do with your follies, or those of that crack-brained old fool, Stephen?" was the rough response, with a waving away of the obtruded slate, which was really a dash of impatience and sent it ringing to the floor. "Away with you to the scullery, and at once, before worse happens to you!"

"Ees, measter."

With this stereotyped assurance Letty Bryce started to obey—oh, how quickly and gladly! Not pausing to pick up the slate, she had crossed the apartment, and was indeed at the door, her hand upon it, and the key already turned in the lock, without Walter Bracy being quite aware of the rapidity of her going. Indeed, how could he have been?—for to the brain, heated and no little obscured by wine, had come in that instant one of the very worst temptations of his evil life, muttered below his breath in the words:

"Should this pretty fool have a pair of lips worth the trying? Who knows? Some devil sent her here, into this lonely room, with none other than myself, on purpose to tempt me! And wherefore not? Her baby-face gave her a home in my house: why should it not pay the penalty? You were jealous of her from the first, peeping and spying, were you, Maude Bracy? By the bones of Old Noll, we shall see whether your sight can pierce oaken doors, to know what is passing here! Half a score of kisses, at least, e'en now, as fair earnest of the future!"

Rapidly as the poor girl had crossed the room and come to the very verge of her escape, this rush of mad, unholy thought had been more rapid through the brain of Walter Bracy; and yet was her hand on the lock, and the door unopened though the bolt was moved,—when one fatal order sounded, which she dared not disobey:

"Stop! Come back hither! I have bethought me of an errand to do, before you go."

Stricken by an undefinable fear, and yet with no thought of the danger which really menaced, Letty Bryce returned for a few steps from the door, waiting what she expected to be a command.—To find her arm grasped with a suddenness and a firmness giving no hope of escape, and to hear the breath of the man she so feared, almost at her ear, hissing into it:

"Wench, you would learn to write! There is something else that I would have you learn, instead—nay, that I *will* have you learn—to love!"

A great fear fell upon the young girl—she had been more or less than human, else—a faint sinking of the heart and momentary dying out of the powers of life, in the sudden knowledge of that awful, uncalculated danger, of hearing unholy words and suffering the touch of a bad, reckless man, without the power to resist or resent either! What should she do?—what *could* she do? Her unuttered cry went up; may we not believe that it found an answer in instant inspiration? For in the next moment, even had Walter Bracy passed through many surprises in his hardened life, beyond doubt he then and there found that to surpass them all. He had seized upon a poor, helpless, but innocent victim: he found in his hand, if manner and speech could be credited, one little likely to be a victim, even to him!

"Whoy, measter," came the stunning reply, "what be 'ee a-goin' on in that a-way, for? 'Ee want I for a lass, do 'ee? Well, that bean't so woundy hard, to kiss a gentleman—noa; I did be knowin' all about un, so long ago as I can't tell 'ee—ees!"

"You!" the word of surprise came from the lips of the abuser of the helpless with almost the force of an imprecation. "You—what—you hussy—the love of a gentleman is no novelty to you, it would seem!" In the extremity of his surprise, and perhaps of an actual momentary repugnance, he dropped grasp of her arm. Another surprise followed, scarcely less pronounced than that of the previous moment; for the instant that she found her stratagem in so far successful, and herself free from the hold of the man so dreaded, she turned, with the speed of light, and made for the door, remembering, what her pursuer could not know, that it was unlocked, and intent to open it before he could again reach her, and to flee away down the long hallway, into Maude Bracy's apartment, anywhere and at any risk, so that the touch so feared and hated might be escaped.

CHAPTER XI.

VIOLENT DEEDS AND SUDDEN DEATH.

But, rapidly as the young girl fled from the man of violence, there was lack of speed for the intent. Some faint suspicion that he was about to be foiled by stratagem may have passed through the brain of Walter Bracy, even though heated and a trifle thickened by wine; for before she could do more than reach the door and lay hand upon the lock—before the fastening could be moved and the door opened even one hair's breadth, his rapid step had pursued and overtaken her, and she felt his strong arms about her waist, dragging her back toward the centre of the apartment, while his half-smothered exclamations blended fully awakened passion and ungovernable rage:

"What, minion! you would fly me! By the Lord, scullion, it is a bold game to play, to mock *me* in my own house! God's wounds!—what care I whether you are springald or leman!"

Scarce could one have believed that so much strength lay in the girlish and almost childish figure, as that shown in the despairing and wordless fight for that purity so much dearer than life, as the rude hands dragged her backward from the door and the inflamed countenance of the cruel master looked that fiery love which is a thousand times more deadly than hate, into her own frightened face. But of what avail even that strength, full exerted, against the thews and sinews of the strong man, strengthened even if maddened by the wine he had imbibed? His grasp tightened upon her; he bent down in the effort to force away that unloved bloom from the red lips that so at that moment loathed their very ripeness and the evil attraction they formed.

Then a great cry broke from her, in her despair:

"Oh, no! no! no! Walter Bracy! For the sake of God!"

"What!" again spoke the master, in this still new surprise—"those words, to *me*, and from *you*, wench!" But his hold upon the shrinking form did not relax; and it was a very different voice and manner that the instant after pleaded so pitifully.

"Oh, don't 'ee, measter!—don't 'ee hurt poor Letty, for un love o' heaven! I be so poor and mean, like, measter! Oh, let poor Letty go, won't 'ee, now, please?"

"Silence, minion, or it will be the worse for you!" answered the violent man, literally holding her as in a vise, but, alas!—a vise harder than one of iron, because instinct with human passion and all the devilish impulses in its train.

He forced down his face to hers, in spite of all her